

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

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1. Name of Property

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historic name Four Stairs

other names/site number Fairfax Co. Inventory #13-3-A1/DHR site 029-0106

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2. Location

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street & number 840 Leigh Mill Road

not for publication N/A

city or town Great Falls

vicinity N/A

state Virginia code VA county Fairfax 059 zip code 22066

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3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ___ nationally ___ statewide X locally. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria. ___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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4. National Park Service Certification

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I, hereby certify that this property is:

_____ entered in the National Register _____

_____ See continuation sheet. __________ determined eligible for the
National Register __________ See continuation sheet. __________ determined not eligible for the
National Register _____

_____ removed from the National Register _____

_____ other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper_____
Date
of Action

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5. Classification

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Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

 X private
_____ public-local
_____ public-State
_____ public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

 X building(s)
_____ district
_____ site
_____ structure
_____ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 5 </u> buildings
<u> 1 </u>	_____ sites
<u> 1 </u>	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
<u> 3 </u>	<u> 5 </u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National
Register 0 Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part
of a multiple property listing.) N/A

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6. Function or Use

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Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTICSub: single dwellingFUNERARYcemeteryDOMESTICwell

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTICSub: single dwellingFUNERARYcemeteryDOMESTICwellAGRICULTUREsheds

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7. Description

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Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

COLONIAL / Postmedieval EnglishMID-19TH CENTURY / Greek Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundations STONEroofs WOOD / Shakewalls WOOD / LogWOOD / Weatherboardchimneys STONEBRICK

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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8. Statement of Significance

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Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- _____ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- X B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- X C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- _____ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- _____ a owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- _____ b removed from its original location.
- _____ c a birthplace or a grave.
- _____ d a cemetery.
- _____ e a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- _____ f a commemorative property.
- _____ g less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE
EXPLORATION / SETTLEMENT
POLITICS / GOVERNMENT

Period of Significance ca. 1737 to ca. 1850 Significant Dates ca.1737
ca.1796
ca.1850

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above) Captain John Jackson, Jr. (1737-1819)

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

___ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

___ previously listed in the National Register

___ previously determined eligible by the National Register

___ designated a National Historic Landmark

X recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # **14, Fairfax Co., VA**

___ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

X State Historic Preservation Office

___ Other State agency

X Federal agency

X Local government

___ University

___ Other

Name of repository: Fairfax County Department of Planning & Zoning
Historic American Buildings Survey

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property **6.4071 acres**

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>18</u>	<u>302820</u>	<u>4317510</u>	3	___	___	___
2	___	___	___	4	___	___	___

___ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (see continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification (see continuation sheet)

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11. Form Prepared By

=====

name/title Tanya Edwards Beauchamp / architectural historian

organization Tanya Edwards Beauchamp, Associates date 03-01-2004

street & number 930 Leigh Mill Road telephone 703-759-3796

city or town Great Falls state VA zip code 22066

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Additional Documentation

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage
or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.
Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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Property Owner

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(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Private Historic Preservation Group LLC

street & number 840 Leigh Mill Road telephone 703-759-2502

city or town Great Falls state VA zip code 22066

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget,

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Four Stairs

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Summary Description

Four Stairs began as a gable-roofed, one-room, one-story with loft log house which may have been built by Northern Neck frontier planter Thomas Simmons as early as the 1730s. A shed-roofed west side log pen and rear shed-roofed timber-framed kitchen met additional needs of its occupants. After its acquisition by the Jackson family in 1796, it was refined and expanded by raising the roofs on each element. A Greek Revival frame addition ca. 1850 became the focus of the house, providing a formal central entrance hall. The individual elements of the house have remained distinct, so that the construction history of the house can be read on the exterior. Subsequent twentieth-century owners made renovations in the Colonial Revival style, however much of that material was removed in later renovations. An existing 1960s shed west of the historic house was expanded to create a family room/office and connected to the house by an open breeze-way (non-contributing). A 2002-04 major restoration/rehabilitation of the house has meticulously restored and replaced historic fabric in kind. The structurally fragile kitchen addition was removed and replaced with a hand-crafted, timber-framed kitchen addition compatible with the original log house. The property also contains a family cemetery (contributing site), a stone-lined hand-dug well (contributing structure), and four additional noncontributing 1960s sheds.

Detailed Description

Four Stairs is sited facing approximately north and south on high ground on a steeply rolling 22-acre parcel at 840 Leigh Mill Road in the Dranesville District of Fairfax County, VA. It is located near the Great Falls of the Potomac River, south of the Georgetown Pike, Rte. 193, and north of Difficult Run. The latter drains into the Potomac below the falls and its course is deeply cut into the adjacent land. There are two running streams on the property tributary to the Captain Hickory Branch of Difficult Run on the west side of the property. These streams, one to the east and one to the west of the high ground on which the dwelling is located, have cut deep ravines. The approach to the house is down from Leigh Mill Road, crossing the eastward stream on a twentieth-century concrete and wood bridge and up a simple curving, crushed bluestone lane to the house at the top of the hill. There is cleared land maintained as lawn surrounding the house on all sides. Two ancient Osage orange trees are located in front of the 1850s entrance to the house. Various non-

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contributing twentieth-century sheds are located to the west. There is a broad expanse of nearly level lawn on the south side of the house. This appears to be the original eighteenth-century entrance facade. A family cemetery is located near the center of this space. An old stone-lined hand-dug well is located here on the west side of the house and will remain exposed as an historic feature. The remainder of the property is forested. A 6.4071-acre conservation easement has been created to protect the house and its setting. The owner intends to expand this easement at a later time.

Four Stairs is a telescope-form dwelling, rare in this area, which clearly exhibits in its external appearance the stages of growth that it has experienced since its beginnings. There are three distinct blocks visible on the southern facade. Each is a two-story gable-roofed building with its own entrance. The central original section, which may date from the 1730s, began as a one-story, one-room with loft above log house. An additional one-story log shed-roofed pen and a timber-framed shed-roofed kitchen were added to the west and north sides respectively, probably soon after the original section was built. The house was then expanded by raising the roofs to allow a full second story, probably in the late 1790s after its acquisition by the Jackson family. It is probable that a new east entrance with a shed-roofed porch was added at this time. A two-story Greek Revival transitional frame addition was constructed in the 1850s with a new main entrance on the north side of the house. In the 1960s the house was renovated in the mid-century Colonial Revival style with additions on the west end of the house including expansion of an undistinguished twentieth-century garage/stable into additional living space connected to the main house by a breeze-way. The restoration/rehabilitation project by the present owner has removed most of the 1950s work and the deteriorated late-eighteenth-century north addition, replacing them with timber-framed additions compatible with the historic structure.

The Original Log House

The original gable-roofed log house was an early settler's residence, 18' long x 16.2' deep, containing a single room with loft above. It was probably built by the owner himself, using the materials at hand. Trees plentiful on the site, and those felled when the site was cleared, may have been used to build the log house. Species include chestnut, red oak, white oak, locust, and walnut. These logs were shaped by hand with a broad axe and V-notched. They were chinked with a mixture of clay, lime, and horse and/or hog hair over local stone. The latter was flat, river-washed stone. The walls were weatherboarded and white-washed

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originally, as indicated by the discovery during restoration of bent individually forged nails remaining from the original furring. There were entrance doors and a single window on both north and south facades. The door and sash do not appear to be original, although the frames are pegged. The north entrance was discovered during the restoration. It had been used to house plumbing and radiator pipes and concealed during a twentieth-century renovation. The gabled roof was shingled with rived oak. The log walls showed the effects of thrust. It is possible that this chimney was originally made of the wood and clay available on the site, water-proofed with pitch and white-washed on the outside, and lined with clay on the inside. Such a temporary fall-away chimney was common on the frontier and would account for the thrust of the walls. The foundation is of local stone, laid six feet deep without footings, and dug five feet to virgin soil. There is a breach in the foundation wall here with a white-washed walk-out to a root cellar under the main block of the house. It is possible that the original house was built on piers and the cellar with its stone walls added later.

The walls were white-washed on the interior as well as the exterior originally. The white-wash was deteriorated and there was a heavy encrustation of soot built-up in the area of the fireplace. The original floors are still in place in the interior. Six- to ten-inch-wide random-width heart of white or yellow pine boards are pit-sawn and gauged with only the tops smoothed out. In the 2002-04 restoration, these were hand-sanded and oiled. The exposed loft floor joists above are of 2"x 8" tulip poplar. They are pit-sawn, rived or hand split, and beaded. The loft floor itself is similar to that below. Like the hardwood used for the exterior walls, poplar grows abundantly on the site. Scraps of hand-made quirk-beaded trim with hand-made nails, sometimes finish nails were used as shims for the hand-split lath on which the plaster was laid in the 1790s renovation. This trim did not match the new trim and may have been original. Physical evidence shows that entrance to the loft was by a ladder through an opening in the ceiling, followed by a stair facing south. This stair was built of heart of white pine or hemlock, indicative of the virgin forest, which existed when the house was first built, and which still exists in small pockets near the falls.

Later Eighteenth-Century Additions

A shed-roofed log pen was added to the west side of the house and a timber-framed shed-roofed kitchen addition was added to the north side soon after the original house was built. The west addition is 14' x 15.6,' with a dirt floor and a large fireplace built of local stone which shares the log house chimney.

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It is spiked into the original house and there is evidence of weathering on the wall it shares with the log house. It was reputedly used as an animal pen by Mary Roberta Offutt, the last Jackson to live in the house. A stone floor and powder room have now been added. It may originally have served as a kitchen. The structure of the kitchen addition was badly deteriorated, held together with a sistered end to keep it from falling down. The studs of the original roof were 3"x 3"± with a square tenon mortised into the wall plate. There were a door and a window on the north side in line with those of the log house. There was little weathering on the original north wall of the log house, indicating that the kitchen addition was constructed soon after the original house. The substantial stone chimneys, here and in the log house, appear to have been built by the same person using the metamorphic rock of the Carderock formation, available on site. The kitchen chimney was in extremely poor repair and was re-built using the same stone and an appropriate lime mortar.

The log house was updated and significantly enlarged at some point in the eighteenth century. The roof of the original log house was raised to add a full second story. Six or eight courses of logs of varying size were added. These were V-notched and slightly larger than the original logs, with the end grain more polished than those of the weathered original. The roof of the rear addition was raised to meet the new slope, ending just below the new roof ridge. This was accomplished by adding cripple studs tapered and spiked into the notched original studs. All were roofed with hand-split oak shakes. In the 2002-04 restoration, asphalt roofing was replaced with split oak shakes. Existing windows were enlarged and fitted with 6/6 light sash in the late eighteenth century renovation. In the second story windows were added on each of the main facades with 6/6 light sash on the south side and 4/4 lights on the north side, all centered above the existing openings. A mortised and tenoned paneled entrance door was added on the south side. It appears to have been fabricated off-site and cut down to fit the existing early opening. It is similar to those at the nearby William Gunnell House and Bryan Fairfax's Towlston Grange. These are nearby mid-eighteenth-century historic properties. At some point a door was opened from the log house on the northeast side. The stair was reversed to its present position at this door. Although this side was not revealed during the 2002-04 renovation, the existence of a lap joint on the south wall of the log house would indicate that a porch had been built along the east wall which was removed during the ca. 1850 renovation.

After Jackson purchased the property in 1796, the interior was plastered throughout. The lath was laid in a diagonal pattern and applied over the white-washed logs. The nails used combined a machine-made shank and hand-made head of a type manufactured in a Georgetown establishment that opened in the 1790s. The plaster was made of horse hair and lime typical of that period. A stair was

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added along the east wall at the south entrance. The existing chair rail and baseboard were added at this time. All of the renovations discussed above predated the plastering.

Jackson Alterations ca. 1850

A two-story, three-bay, parlor-and-side-hall-plan frame addition in a vernacular Greek Revival style was constructed on the east side of the original log house ca. 1850. With a footprint of 26.5' x 18.25,' this addition is larger and higher than the earlier portions of the house. A formal entrance in the third bay of the north side shifts the focus of the building from the south to the north facade. The roof is gabled and shingled with white oak shakes, but was constructed at a lower pitch than the earlier roofs. Its eaves also project decisively beyond the facades, and turn the corners to create a finished cornice detail. Windows are 6/6 light sash in all windows with simple projecting heads and sills of walnut. They have been repaired or replaced in kind using hand tools to replicate the original. The original blown glass was matched and replaced in kind where necessary. The entrance composition suggests classical derivation with a simple projecting element capping the architrave. Side-lights, each with three lights above a recessed panel, are framed with simple recessed paneled pilasters which on the outside rise to the architrave. The door is paneled in a similar manner with two long panels over two short panels. This detail may have been copied by local craftsmen from an architectural pattern book. A 6" x 10" mud sill was harvested from another location--perhaps a barn which has been demolished. A brick push-away chimney at the east end of this addition is taller and sligher than the eighteenth-century chimneys.

The new entrance door opens onto a hall, transforming the house into a center hall-plan dwelling with a parlor on the east and dining room on the west in the original house. A simpler, rear hall entrance door occurs on the south side. The staircase is very fine, curving upward three floors to the attic level. A graceful cherry handrail follows its lines, supported by turned balusters. There is a substantial carved walnut newel post. The treads are yellow pine. A large window at the second-floor landing fills the hall interiors with light. The space contrasts with the adjacent dark and intimate dining room in the old log house. The new parlor is also a high-ceilinged, light-filled room. The original mantel has been replaced with an undistinguished mid-twentieth-century stock Colonial Revival mantel. At the beginning of the present renovation the north wall of the 1850s addition was bowed out, with the structure precariously

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supported by small piles of rocks. This condition was corrected. Deteriorated original weatherboarding was removed in the 1960s and replaced with redwood weatherboarding. This had, in turn, deteriorated and was replaced in the present renovation. Part of the original non-tapered 7" lap siding was found on a three-foot section at the entrance door, and this was matched in the renovation.

When the house passed out of Jackson ownership in 1928 it was in dire need of repair. The new owners renovated the house, adding plumbing, central heat, and other modern features. John and Mary Bird, purchasing the house in 1953, made substantial repairs and extended the house to the west in the 1960s in a mid-century Colonial Revival style. The present owners have stabilized and carefully restored each element of the building, replacing deteriorated fabric with compatible timber-framed work constructed by craftsmen using old methods.

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NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary Statement of Significance

Four Stairs is a rare example of an early-eighteenth-century up-country Potomac planter's residence and the only extant such dwelling in Great Falls. It exhibits in its appearance, and in its materials and methods of construction, the evolution of regional vernacular architecture from early settlement into the twentieth century. The original house was crafted with hand tools using the materials available on the site. Gradually it was enlarged and refined to meet changing domestic requirements. Timber-framing succeeded log construction and was, in turn, replaced by a transitional frame construction introducing an element of fashion in the Greek Revival style. All were retained side-by-side and melded together. After 1796, the work of African slaves is apparent. Machine-made components were introduced from Georgetown as transportation and availability improved. Four Stairs is located near early roads, turnpikes, and canals along the Potomac route to the west. Purchased in 1796 by Captain John Jackson, Jr., son of an early settler and, with his sons, a major landowner in the area, the property was lived in by his family for five generations. Prominent in early Fairfax County politics, Jackson was appointed a justice of the peace in 1798, and served as a captain of militia.

Detailed Statement of Significance

Ellzey / Simmons

In the summer of 1608 Captain John Smith explored the Potomac River as far as the Little Falls above the mouth of Pimmit Run. By the end of the seventeenth century, a few settlers had ventured into the hostile frontier as far as the Sugarlands along the upper Potomac above the Great Falls. The Northern Neck Proprietary was patented in 1649 and recorded after the Restoration in 1662. The Land Office for the Northern Neck Proprietary was created by Thomas, Fifth Lord Fairfax, in 1690 and in 1702 Robert Carter of Corotoman was appointed as agent. The 1709 Sugarlands grant to Daniel McCarty was the earliest here after creation of the Land Office. In the period 1716-1724, large grants including thousands of acres were made to Alexander Scott, Thomas Lee, and George

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Tuberville along the Upper Potomac between Great Falls and Little Falls. A few smaller grants were then made in the remaining land.

It was in this context that Carter authorized John Warner to survey for Lewis Ellzey a 544-acre tract on the north side of Difficult Run at the first large branch near the Great Falls of the Potomac River. The plat was recorded on December 17, 1730.¹ A blank deed was drawn and registered in N.N.G. Book C: Folio 134, but had not been signed by the time of Carter's death in 1732. Thomas, Sixth Lord Fairfax, succeeding to the proprietary after his mother Catherine's death, arrived in Virginia in the spring of 1736 and remained until the autumn of 1737, personally undertaking the affairs of the proprietary. On January 6, 1737, he honored Carter's commitment to Ellzey. The deed was recorded on June 6, 1737.²

Ellzey was Fairfax County's first sheriff, a captain in the Virginia Militia, a county justice, and a church warden and vestryman. His residence was on a large tract of land on Pope's Head Run in western Fairfax. Strategically located on both the Ox and Mountain Roads, this land had direct access to the eighteenth-century ports of Colchester and Alexandria.³ The 544-acre Great Falls tract was one of many speculative frontier tracts that Ellzey acquired. It included difficult terrain, stony soil, and was, by contrast with other areas of the Northern Neck, isolated from commercial centers. Its importance lay in the perceived industrial prospects offered by the power of the Great Falls and the potential development of a Potomac route to the west.

It was not until Spotswood's Treaty of Albany in 1722 and the subsequent withdrawal of the Iroquois beyond the Blue Ridge that the upper Potomac lands were open to settlement and immigration. The Sugarlands Rolling Road was mentioned in correspondence between Carter and Lee in 1728, and is shown on contemporaneous plats.⁴ It passed along Difficult Run at the lower end of Ellzey's grant. Its destination was a ferry located at the mouth of Pimmit Run on Thomas Lee's land below the Little Falls. Here, at the head of Potomac navigation, a public ferry and ordinary were officially licensed in 1738. In 1742, a tobacco warehouse was officially designated at the site.

John Warner's *Plat for Thomas, Lord Fairfax, Esq., June 6, 1739*, of the 12,588-acre Great Falls Manor⁵ shows Ellzey's grant with the house of Thomas Simmons drawn in the approximate location of Four Stairs. This was the only house on the survey. On September 16, 1743, Ellzey deeded the lower 300 acres of this tract to Thomas Simmons, planter.⁶ Although no lease has yet been found, it is clear that Simmons was established here well before the land was deeded to him. Fairfax created strict standards for the construction of tenant houses,

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requiring a 16' x 20' or 16' x 16' footprint. These standards were consistently followed elsewhere, so it is reasonable to conclude that Four Stairs, 18.5' x 26.2,' was built before Fairfax took control of the Northern Neck Proprietary during his 1736-37 visit. In addition to his farming activities, Simmons operated a gristmill here on Captain Hickory Branch, near its confluence with Difficult Run. This stream is still known to long-time residents as Simmons Mill Branch and the ruins of the mill remain on the site.

By the time of the American Revolution, the Sugarlands Rolling Road, passing by the Simmons tract, had become a well-traveled route maintained under the authority of the Fairfax County Court. Simmons deeded his 300-acre tract to William Hepburn and John Dundass and their wives of Alexandria on June 1, 1786.⁷ William Hepburn was an initial subscriber to the stock of George Washington's Patowmack Company, organized to open and extend the navigation of the Potomac above the Little Falls through a series of channel improvements and skirting canals. He was listed among those present at the organizing meeting in Alexandria on May 17, 1785.⁸ The outlet section of the Potomac Canal from Little Falls to the head of tidewater above Georgetown was completed in 1795. In 1791, Congress had selected a Potomac River site including Georgetown for the new Federal City. The decision had been made in large part on the basis of the perceived importance of the Potomac route to the west. The Corporation of Georgetown organized the Georgetown Bridge Company that same year, and by 1797 the Falls Bridge was completed, connecting the old Sugarlands Rolling Road directly with the port of Georgetown and the Federal City. The Hepburns and Dundasses, in turn, conveyed the land to John Nicholson and his wife Hannah of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on April 15, 1795.⁹ The interest of all of these parties appears to have been speculative, based on the commercial prospects of opening the Potomac route to the west. On October 29, 1796, the Nicholsons deeded the land to John Jackson, Jr.¹⁰

The Jackson Family

John Jackson, Sr., his wife Sarah, and son John Jackson, Jr., (1737-1819) held a three-lives lease, executed in 1769, on 400 acres on Scott's Run near the Potomac River below Difficult Run. Their home was built on the stone and log ruins of an early settler's cabin. John Jr. and his second wife, Ann Wiggenton, were married in 1765. Seven children were born to the couple, including John Theodore (1769-1831) who married Verlinda (ca. 1782-1863), Spencer (1773-1830) who married Penelope Ratcliffe (died 1837), and Richard (1778-1823) who married Jane Donaldson (1796-1872). After the death of John Sr. in 1785, John Jr. formalized his claim to the Scott's Run land and began large-scale acquisition

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of additional land along the Potomac in the present McLean-Great Falls area and in Ohio. He and his sons acquired thousands of acres of prime agricultural land during their lifetimes and owned many slaves. They were a close-knit family who lived in proximity to each other on adjacent parcels near the Great Falls of the Potomac. Jackson was a justice of the peace in Fairfax County with a life appointment by the governor of Virginia. A captain of militia, he was known also as Captain John Jackson.¹¹ When the Falls Bridge Turnpike Company was organized in 1813 to build a direct turnpike that would connect Georgetown with Leesburg, the Jackson brothers subscribed. John Jackson served on the board of directors and Spencer contracted to build the road as it passed over Difficult Run and along their lands.¹²

In his will, Captain John Jackson bequeathed the 300-acre Simmons tract where Four Stairs is located to his eldest son, John Theodore Jackson. The hay and "all other long fodder and the small grain in the ground" were included in the bequest, suggesting that this son was farming the tract.¹³ John Theodore Jackson had married Verlinda (date of birth and surname unknown) shortly after his father's purchase of the Four Stairs property. Six children were born to the couple between 1801 and 1817. It is probable that the plastering and other substantial renovations were made to the house to transform the old Simmons log house into a more appropriate residence for the young couple while they were building their permanent residence, the Verlinda Jackson House, on a nearby tract. The latter was a large and elaborate two-story log house.

Robert Ratcliffe Jackson (1796-1872), the son of John Theodore's brother Spencer, married his cousin Matilda A. Jackson (1804-1885), John Theodore and Verlinda's daughter, in 1828. John Theodore died intestate in 1831. In the partition suit that followed, Robert and Matilda were assigned the Simmons tract.¹⁴ Before his death, John Theodore had begun building a new brick house for Matilda's younger sister Julia Ann (1812-1848) who, at the age of sixteen, had married in 1828, shortly after Matilda. This was a grand Federal-style brick house, atypical for up-country Potomac planters. Julia's marriage was unfortunately short-lived, and she and her infant daughter remained with Verlinda. Robert and Matilda moved into the unfinished new brick house for several years, paying rent to Verlinda, Julia's guardian.¹⁵ This house, now called Cornwell Farm, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In 1839, Julia married John Rowzee (died 1880), her mother's farm manager, and moved into the new house.

Robert and Matilda returned to Four Stairs. Eight children were born to them between 1829 and 1838. Major alterations at Four Stairs ca. 1850 accommodated the growing family. In 1854 Robert purchased the 100+ acre Difficult Mill tract

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adjacent to the Simmons tract where he lived.¹⁶ Leigh Mill Road was originally called Jackson Mill Road and the present subdivision of the Difficult Mill tract is still called Jackson Mill Woods. Robert occupied himself with farming, milling, and tending to his large extended family's affairs. The latter included trips south to lease and retrieve slaves and to return his sister Harriet's orphaned children to Virginia from Mississippi. His eldest daughter, Rosanna (1833-1905), married Joshua Warfield Offutt (1816-83) in 1856 and moved to a house her husband built for her on Clewenwald Enlarged, a family property at Offutt's Corners, now Potomac, on the River Road near the Great Falls in Montgomery County, Maryland. This property is now the site of the Congressional Country Club.¹⁷

Eight children were born to Rosanna and Joshua between 1857 and 1878. Rosanna's ties to her family remained strong and she returned to them for the birth of her two eldest children, probably at Four Stairs. Her sister Mary Roberta (1836-1869) married James W. Barden (1815-1875) in 1866. Mary Roberta died March 17, 1869, a month after the birth of her first child. Her younger sister, Laura Verlinda (1840-1869), died two days later. Both sisters died of a contagious fever, probably typhoid. Mary Roberta's infant son Robert died July 16, 1869.¹⁸ The three are buried at the house in a small plot with an iron fence and a single headstone for the sisters and a small stone for the infant Robert. The graveyard was in disrepair when the present owner took charge. He has restored the fence and this headstone, but it is not known if any other family members are buried there.

After the death of these two sisters only Rosanna and her brother James Theodore Jackson (1831-1889) of Robert and Matilda's eight children survived. In 1860, Robert and Matilda deeded 71 acres of the Simmons tract, together with other lands, to James.¹⁹ James married Margaretta Gunnell (1839-1922) in 1868. On September 6, 1869, Robert and Matilda deeded 200 acres of the Simmons tract, including Four Stairs, and Matilda's share of her mother's dower lot to Joshua Warfield Offutt, Rosanna, and her children. The gift was made providing that "no addition of graves be made at either of the Family burial grounds, except it be for the family of the said Joshua W. Offutt and James T. Jackson under penalty of a forfeiture of this deed."²⁰

Robert died in 1872; Joshua, in 1883; Matilda, in 1885; and Rosanna, in 1905. In 1910, following the death of Robert and Rosanna's son Franklin, the Offutt lands in Great Falls were partitioned. The house and burial ground, located on the 16.98-acre Parcel 3 of the Offutt Home Tract, were allotted to Mary Roberta Offutt Dunn. Mrs. Dunn, then widowed, paid an additional \$600.00 cash to the other heirs for the house.²¹ She lived alone at Four Stairs until her death in 1927. The property was sold on the courthouse steps to Mark Turner on February

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11, 1928.²²

Architectural Significance

Constructed ca. 1737 with major renovations ca. 1796, 1850, 1960, and 2004, the history of Four Stairs is clearly visible in its telescoping form. Each section has been retained and treated with respect as changes of ownership, family needs, fashion, and construction practice have required alteration and expansion of the original log house. Existing stairs remained as each change took place leading to the name "Four Stairs," bestowed ca. 1928 when ownership passed out of the Jackson family. Lacking reasonable access to commercial centers, the ca. 1737 house was hand-crafted using local stone, clay, and wood available on-site. Nails were individually forged. The substantial status of the owner was reflected in fine detail such as the beaded ceiling joists and chair rails.

By 1796, when the next resident owner took possession, there was a well-traveled road passing by the property with good access to the port of Georgetown. Construction in this period reflected this improved commerce. The wire-cut nails were probably made in a newly-opened factory in Georgetown. The doors were also made off-site and cut to fit the existing openings. Captain John Jackson, the wealthy landowner, had many slaves and their labor is reflected in the construction of the new additions. When Jackson's grandson Robert adapted the house to his own growing family's needs ca. 1850, a transitional frame method of construction was utilized and a Greek Revival mode was selected. The new addition was filled with light, and, by providing a central hall, imparted a sense of formality to the old house. By 1850 there was ready access by turnpike and canal to many commercial centers including the District of Columbia, Alexandria, Leesburg, and Rockville. Again, slave labor is evident as old construction methods were slowly adapted to new design. The fine stair may have been crafted by cabinet-makers set up on the west side of Georgetown near the Georgetown Pike. It is one of three such 1850 stairs extant in present-day Great Falls, suggesting that a retail merchant was buying building materials in Georgetown and selling them to customers in the area.

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The 2002-2004 restoration/rehabilitation of the house has, as was the case with earlier renovations, adapted the house for contemporary needs while retaining and meticulously restoring the earlier fabric. The choice of hand-wrought timber-framing for the new work complements the historic fabric and is particularly appropriate.

ENDNOTES

1. Northern Neck Loose Surveys (Prince William County), Box D-F, Folder 186, 17 December 1730, Library of Virginia.
2. Northern Neck Grants E, 1736-1742, p. 7 (Reel 291), Library of Virginia.
3. Beth Mitchell, *An Interpretive Map of Fairfax County, Virginia, in 1760*, edited by Donald M. Sweig, County of Fairfax: Office of Comprehensive Planning, 1987.
4. Carter Letter Book (MSS Collection, Virginia Historical Society).
5. Northern Neck Grants E, 1736-1742, pp.38- 41, Library of Virginia.
6. Fairfax County Deeds, A, p. 475, 16 September, 1743.
7. Loudoun County Deeds, X, p. 344, 1 June 1786.
8. Mrs. Cora Bacon-Foster, "Early Chapters in the Development of the Potomac Route to the West," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D. C.* Vol. 15. Washington, D. C.: published by the Society, 1912, pp 147-50.
9. Loudoun County Deeds, W, p. 32, 15 April 1795.
10. Loudoun County Deeds, X, p. 344, 29 October 1796.

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11. Jean Tibbetts, *My land...your land...This Land at Cornwell Farm*, Great Falls, pp 128-133.
12. Falls Bridge Turnpike Company, "Correspondence, Reports, etc. 1818-1825," Board of Public Works, Box 264, Archives, Library of Virginia.
13. Fairfax County Will Book, L1, 319-324.
14. Fairfax County Deeds, C3, pp. 402-410, 25 April 1831.
15. Fairfax County Chancery file 52h, *Robert R. Jackson vs. Verlinda Jackson*, 1831-1835.
16. Fairfax County Deeds, U3, p. 445, 21 August 1854.
17. Offutt Family Genealogy, Montgomery County Historical Society.
18. Offutt Family Bible
19. Fairfax County Deeds, H4, 121, 13 January 1860.
20. Fairfax County Deeds, K4, 432, 8 September 1869.
21. Fairfax County Deeds, G7, 327, 10 August 1910.
22. Fairfax County Deeds, E10, 493, 11 February, 1928.

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Fairfax County Chancery Suit. 52h (1831-35). *Robert R. Jackson vs. Verlinda Jackson.*
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Fairfax County Will Book. L1:319-324.
Falls Bridge Turnpike Company. Correspondence, Reports, etc. 1818-1825. Board of Public Works. Box 264, Archives, Library of Virginia.
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Northern Neck Grants. C(1729-1731), 134; E(1736-1742), 7-7a; 40-41.
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Offutt Family Genealogy. Montgomery County Maryland Historical Society.

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Standing Files

Fairfax County Library, Virginia Room
Montgomery County [MD] Historical Society
Prince William County Regional Library, RELIC
Thomas Balch Library
Virginia Department of Historic Resources

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

Four Stairs is located at 840 Leigh Mill Road, Great Falls, VA 22066. The property includes the entire 6.4071-acre conservation district proposed in old lots 2 & 3 of the Offutt Home Tract, part of a 21.4714-acre parcel recorded in Fairfax County Deed Book 12764, p.0899. See attached plat.

Verbal Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the nominated property are the legal recorded boundaries of the conservation easement for the historic site and contain all historic resources associated with the property.

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

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MAPS

1. USGS map, 7.5 minute series, indicating the property's location.
2. Plat showing primary and secondary resources and boundaries of nominated property
3. Excerpt from John Warner's 1739 survey plat of Thomas Fairfax's Great Falls Manor tract showing Ellzey's 544 acre tract with house of Thomas Simmons.

REPRESENTATIVE BLACK & WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS

The following information is common to all photographs:

Four Stairs

Fairfax County, Virginia

Tanya Edwards Beauchamp, photographer

March 2004

Negatives at Virginia Department of Historic Resources archives, Richmond, VA

1. View of site, burying ground in foreground, non-contributing buildings at left. Looking north. Negative # 21333:8.
2. South Facade. Looking north. Negative # 21333:10.
3. Perspective view, south facade. Ca. 1850 addition at right. Looking northwest. Negative # 21333:19.
4. Perspective view, north facade. Ca. 1850 addition at left. Looking southwest. Negative # 21333:16.
5. Interior view, original log house. Looking southwest. Negative # 21333:20.
6. Interior view, original log house. Looking southeast. Negative # 21333:21.
7. Interior view, ca. 1850 stair hall. Looking southwest. Negative # 21333:22.
8. Interior view, new timber-framed kitchen. Original log house north facade at left. Looking southwest. Negative # 21333:24.